Leisure, Culture and the Third Sector Scrutiny Board

17 August, 2015

Summary of Matters Considered at the Board

Report of the Chair, Councillor Ahmed

The Scrutiny Board met on 17 August, 2015 and the following items were considered. I have selected the main points of the discussion that I feel members of the Council will be particularly interested to know more about. For more detail, a copy of the minutes is available on the Committee Management Information System (CMIS) via the Council's website at http://cmis.sandwell.gov.uk/cmis5/

1.   The Third Sector in Sandwell

The Board was given an overview of the third sector in Sandwell. It learned that there are currently around 1,000 third sector organisations in the Borough, providing a range of different services; from small volunteer led organisations, to large national bodies delivering services through contracts.

The Board is pleased to hear that, despite significant reductions in its budgets the Council has continued to maintain a grants programme, delivered through its Third Sector Funding Strategy. However, changes are required to the way in which grant funding is managed in the future to maximise the benefits to the Borough and address need appropriately. One of the work streams in the Facing the Future programme will be looking at this area and the Board has asked for a report providing more detail on this.

The Board discussed the increasing importance of supporting third sector organisations to enable them to access external funding and is aware that there is a small number of membership/umbrella organisations that provide this sort of support. The Board has invited representatives from Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations, the Volunteer Centre, and Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service to its next meeting to educate the Board on their work.

2.   **Third Sector Support for Care Leavers**

The scrutiny board chairs, as a collective, have decided to carry out a piece of work to look at how scrutiny can demonstrate its commitment and support to Children's Services' improvement journey. Each board has been asked to contribute to this by focussing on an area within its terms of reference.

The Board received a presentation on the support available from the third sector to care leavers. At the time of reporting there were 190 care leavers in the Borough, ranging from those not in education, employment or training to those undertaking post-graduate qualifications. The Board is pleased to note that Sandwell has one of the highest numbers of care leavers at university in the Black Country and is saddened that this was not recognised in the recent Ofsted report on Children's Services.

The Board heard about how the Leaving Care Service works with a variety of third sector organisations in different ways to provide support with accommodation and independent living, budgeting, parenting, substance abuse, employment and training, and counselling services.

The Board agreed to submit the following recommendations to the scrutiny chairs:-

- that third sector organisations be approached, in particular the Volunteer Centre, Sandwell Community Information and Participation Service and Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations, to ascertain what their organisation can provide, specifically in relation to mentoring and befriending services for care leavers;

- that consideration be given to approaching retired foster carers, teachers, social workers and youth workers to see if they would be willing to act as a mentor/befriender to a care leaver;

- that consideration be given to approaching Council employees and Councillors to see if they would be willing to act as a mentor/befriender to a care leaver and that the Council's employee volunteering scheme be used/enhanced/re-launched for this purpose;

- that the Artemis e-learning facility be used to develop an appropriate training package for organisations and individuals that are able to provide and support a mentoring and befriending service.

Councillor Ahmed
Chair